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OUR METROPOLITAN LABYRINTH

To the Editor:

PERHAPS the most flagrant disregard of public convenience in New York City lies in the careless numbering of houses and inadequacy of street notation. The task of finding an address in a city like New York should not be a difficult proposition, yet it is frequently one of the most disconcerting of the labors on our daily calendar.

Recently a gentleman of my acquaintance sought a dealer in men's furnishings whose street address was given as 503 Fifth Avenue. Search of the proper block revealed a large office building at that address, but failed to disclose the desired store. He consulted a number of persons, and finally was directed to a place somewhere in the middle of the next block. As he walked down Forty-second Street he passed some six or eight small shops all bearing the same Fifth Avenue designation. These places were all independent concerns, with no entrances other than those on Forty-second Street, but they happened to be located in a building whose front door caught the windy gusts of The Avenue, and capitalized that circumstance on their stationery. Similar cases were found up and down the line.

The same gentleman had occasion to look up another dealer, whose place of business was number 912, on an avenue running parallel with Fifth and not far from it. As he stepped from the street car, a curious complication confronted him. The numbers ran: 906, 910, no number, 912, 914, 912, no number, 912. Which of these was his 912? He smote his brow and turned his back on the disordered scene, determined to trade elsewhere.

In the classified list of the telephone directory he found a second dealer and decided to try his luck again. This time he encountered another difficulty. The house numbers in this part of the city had recently been changed and some were of the old order, some of the new. Some houses bore two numbers, some bore none at all. 128 rubbed elbows with 518, 131 strove with 525. My friend dashed into the nearest subway refuge and rode out to Bronx Park to find out how they number the cages in the Zoo!

When he returned it was dark. His errand was unperformed. He determined to try again. Again obstacles arose to confuse him. Whether through false modesty or gross carelessness, householders had neglected to put their street numbers where they could be read in the dark. Occasionally a hall light disclosed a row of figures printed on the transom. Less frequently door lamps were appropriately engraved, but the numbers never seemed to be the ones he wanted. As often as not the address was concealed behind a window-box or hidden in a vestibule or omitted entirely. My friend trudged up

and down the street, musing on the convenience that would result, on the real saving in strength and time, not only for himself but for thousands of other mortals, if people would only employ some systematic and business-like arrangement in their city numbering.

It is up to us to correct the wrong. Streets and houses are hard enough to find in the daytime, doubly so at night. The lack of system is vicious, but not malicious. Let us consider it merely slipshod, and reflect that for a city that has grown in the haphazard fashion of New York even the prevailing inadequacy may be considered remarkable. That, however, is no excuse for continuing the disgrace. New York is not a beautiful city, but it is a singularly attractive place. All it needs to make it even more attractive is the exercise of a little more civic pride, the shouldering of a little more civic responsibility.

Why should we not have a simple system of house numbers, a system that will work in all parts of the city? Let there be a uniform apportionment of fifty numbers to the block, with half numbers where the blocks are of unusual length.

Approximately at First Street, First Avenue begins. Allowing fifty whole numbers to the block, the house on the odd corner of One Hundredth Street would be 5001. Let these numbers be uniform throughout the great parallel streets and avenues of New York. Suppose you wanted to go to 600 Fifth Avenue. The simple process of dividing six hundred by fifty would indicate that your search would end at Twelfth Street. Tenth Avenue begins at Twelfth Street. Under this system, the first number would be 600. The same order would work equally well with crosstown streets. A plan that has proved eminently successful in other places should present no difficulties here. Of course the thorough renumbering of all New York's streets would be necessary, but the labor and expense if undertaken by the individuals directly affected would be slight and more than offset by the convenience of being able to tell at a glance just where one stands.

In more complicated sections of the city the case would be necessarily a little more involved, but not much. With fifty numbers to the block, one could readily determine the number of blocks from the source of the street a given number might be found.

All numbers should be placed where they may be seen both day and night, in places where the ordinary lighting of the building will render them visible, or on the faces of illuminated door lamps.

This brings us to the lamp question. Along many of the streets of one of our larger cities corner lamps are to be seen whose distinct simplicity is at once dignified and beautiful. On each round globe of

ground glass appears the number of the street, in clear print that can be seen from sidewalk and street-car. Besides being intensely practical, the soft brilliancy and uniformity of these lights add very greatly to the beauty of the city.

New York needs all the help it can get along this line, and the demand for improvement is heard on every hand. Without delay the City Fathers should

consider three fundamental reforms: the renumbering of buildings on a consistent and business-like basis, the exploitation of these numbers so they can be seen at a glance at any hour, and the uniform illumination and designation of street lamps, in sections of the city where this has not already been done.

Clemens Moffett

THE ÆSTHETIC IDEAL

By FR. ROUSSEL-DESPIERRES

Translated from the French

BOOK II—Introduction

REALLY universal, the æsthetic ideal dominates morality, education, practical life and even politics, the first law of which is to avoid placing obstacles in the way of the reign of the Ideal. Beauty radiates from the smallest corners of nature; the æsthetic sense exercises itself during the smallest occasions of life. There is always some way of conducting oneself in a more handsome fashion than the common; art does not limit itself to the products of the mind. There is an art of living; there is an art of performing, of carrying oneself and of thinking. Form and ground work, existence—may be all beauty!

But what is beauty? Man can only will whatever he conceives clearly; it is necessary for him to define the object itself of which he forms an ideal. Still, there is not one of the great objects to which human energy can consecrate itself which can be defined with an unquestionable precision. The just, the good, duty, right—these have, according to the latitudes, the surroundings and the individuals, very different meanings. They have no fixed boundaries. And without doubt this lack of precision is a grave imperfection. The greater number of the conceptions of the mind have value only on condition of being very clear. How, for instance, live according to justice, if we do not know with certainty what is just, what is to do or not to do?

The beautiful is no more definable than the just. But even if one could define it, one ought not to attempt it. Beauty draws its worth from feeling; there is no other criterion. People pretend to give an absolute infallible formula of right or duty; beauty has no need of it. Every man has the feeling for the beautiful, and that beauty which he discovers in things escapes all discussion. Nothing so doubtful as the right! On the contrary the reality of the beautiful is complete as soon as it is reflected in the individual conscience. Reason hesitates to determine the just or the true. Before beauty man can not doubt of the feeling which he senses, and this sentiment procures for him certainty without a rival.

If beauty is undefinable, is it at the same time subject to laws? and for the governance of the æsthetic life ought we to recognize these laws at once? and these laws, can they indeed be recognized? The absurdity of theories of æsthetics which define beauty by order, proportion, harmony or any other condition seems to confound, in advance, any new attempt of the kind. It is from reaction against

such theories that this contemporary doctrine was born, according to which, beauty is entirely within us and has no reality whatever in the objects external to us. But if we go to the bottom of things, this doctrine is not true, except so far as a very superficial truth may go. In fact it is less exact than the theories which it combats. Certainly the beautiful has no common measuring rod; each one of us sees in things only the kind and sum of beauty he is capable of recognizing, and all his being—sense and intelligence—unites in that discovery. Feeling for beauty is quite personal; this object or that rouses it in one person and leaves it unmoved in another. Education creates infinite differences between beings in respect to æsthetics; but, this exception made, the doctrine of the relativity of the beautiful is a false doctrine.

We are led astray by our conceptions because we are overrefined. Individual taste, too much cultivated, has become exclusive; thence came doctrinal skepticism. There has been no other means of accommodating the opposing tastes of the overrefined than to declare beauty unreal and entirely subjective. But seek out the reason for an æsthetic feeling among primitive beings, children, peasants: neither one nor the other discusses the beautiful and yet they respond on many an occasion to its attraction. In children the beautiful results especially from physiological emotions, shimmer of colors and lights. The peasant associates beauty with prosperity; he talks of beautiful wheat, beautiful vintages. Beauty in the eyes of a lover decks itself with the hope of enjoyment; beauty—was it not Stendhal who said it?—is a promise of happiness. Thus the æsthetic sense is by turns or altogether a physical sensation, a sentimental or intellectual excitement, a desire idealized by the imagination.

The imagination loves to surpass reality. Without ceasing it creates the unreal, and often that unreal realizes itself. But it also has its logic; it does not like monsters, and that is why the philosophy of bygone days was not so far wrong when it summed up beauty in order of proportion. Proportion and order certainly are not the sources of æsthetic feeling, but they are the conditions essential to pleasure in the beautiful. The mind and especially the senses admit nothing but the logical. The conscience is a perfectly coherent world where nothing incoherent can maintain itself. The same objects in the same conditions provoke the æsthetic feeling in the same